

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

THE EVOLUTION OF HIS EMANCIPATION POLICY

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE
THE CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FEBRUARY 27, 1906

BY
PAUL SELBY

PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY
IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE BIRTH OF
ABRAHAM LINCOLN
FEBRUARY 12, 1909





*Ball's Emancipation Group,
Washington, D. C.*

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Chicago Historical Society:

Next to the service rendered in maintaining the integrity of the Union founded by Washington and his compatriots, nothing stands forth more prominent in the career of Abraham Lincoln than the foresight and achievement manifested in his emancipation policy. While up to the hour of his assassination this brought upon him the vilest obloquy and denunciation ever visited upon an American statesman—surpassing even that heaped upon Washington—yet one of the most striking evidences of the revolution in sentiment wrought in the minds of his enemies by time and a more just conception of what he sought to accomplish, is furnished in the fact that, to-day, some of his most bitter assailants of forty years ago have ranged themselves on the side of his most ardent admirers and enthusiastic eulogists. It is to this phase in his career and what it illustrates—what he foresaw with such unerring sagacity, and what he accomplished with unswerving consistency and devotion to the welfare of the Nation—that the attention of the reader is invited in this address.

It was during one of the darkest of the many dark periods in the history of the war for the preservation of the Union, when Congress and the President were casting about for a policy that would be effective in suppressing the rebellion, that two distinguished leaders of their respective par-

ties, holding opposing views on the subject of slavery, gave utterance, in their respective houses of Congress, to those strikingly similar predictions, based on exactly opposite conditions. Said one of them:

"There is a niche in the temple of fame, a niche near to Washington, which should be occupied by the statue of him who shall save this country. Mr. Lincoln has a mighty destiny. It is for him, if he will, to step into that niche. It is for him to be but a President of the people of the United States, and there will his statue be. But if he choose to be, in these times, a mere sectarian and a party man, that niche will be reserved for some future and better patriot. It is in his power to occupy a place next to Washington, the Founder and Preserver, side by side."¹

The other prediction ran as follows:

"I, too, have a niche for Abraham Lincoln; but it is in Freedom's holy fane, and not in the blood-besmeared temple of human bondage; not surrounded by slave-fetters and chains, but with the symbols of freedom; not dark with bondage, but radiant with the light of Liberty. In that niche he shall stand proudly, nobly, gloriously, with shattered fetters and broken chains, and slave-whips beneath his feet. If Abraham Lincoln pursues the path evidently pointed out for him in the Providence of God, as I believe he will, then he will occupy the proud position I have indicated. That is a fame worth living for; aye, more: that is a fame worth dying for, though that death led through the blood of Gethsemane and the agony of the accursed tree. . . . Let Abraham Lincoln make himself . . . the emancipator, the liberator . . . and his name shall not only be enrolled in this earthly temple, but it will be traced on the living stones of that temple which rears itself amid the thrones and hierarchies of Heaven."²

It will readily be inferred what were the conditions attached to these parallel predictions. With the first it was that Lincoln should use his authority that the institution of slavery might be protected and perpetuated in the States where it already existed; with the second, that slavery should be ultimately exterminated. Both predictions have been fulfilled by subsequent results: The first, in spite of its qualifications, and the last in accordance with

¹*Congressional Globe, 37th Congress (Second Session)*. Speech of Senator John J. Crittenden, of Kentucky, on the Confiscation Bill, April 23, 1862.

²*The same*; Speech of Hon. Owen Lovejoy, of Illinois, in the House of Representatives, on the same measure, April 24, 1862.

them. By common consent, not only of his own countrymen but of the civilized world, Abraham Lincoln has been assigned the place beside Washington here predicted for him. Neither prophet lived to see the entire fulfillment of his prediction, but while the heart of a succeeding generation is thrilled by the fervid eloquence of a Lovejoy, it seems like one of the revenges of history when one of the purest, most patriotic and loyal of the apologists for slavery was permitted to predict the renown of the man most responsible for its overthrow—a result over which his most bitter enemies now rejoice.

Yet the attempt has been renewed at intervals—though less frequently in later years than formerly—to detract from Lincoln a part of the honor due to his memory, by claiming that he was not, in any proper sense of the term, a positive factor in securing the abolition of slavery on this continent; but that, so far as he was concerned, the result was an accident, the outcome and consequence of events and circumstances which he lacked the power to control. At times it has been some Northern representative of a class who opposed the war policy of the Government and predicted disaster from the attempt to resist secession by force of arms; while, again, it has been some adherent of the "Lost Cause," who has thus essayed to apologize for the effort to perpetuate the existence of an institution which was abhorrent to the moral sense of the age and condemned by universal Christendom. Both seek to justify their positions by assuming that the great leader in the cause of practical emancipation had no loftier motive than that which inspired their own action; but they only succeeded in stultifying themselves in face of the fact that their chief argument against both Lincoln's first election and his subsequent war policy was, that he contemplated precisely what they now affect to deny that he accomplished. They were wrong in the one case as they were in the other.

Invaluable as was the service which Lincoln rendered to his country and the cause of free government by his successful efforts for the preservation of the Union, there is no part of his public and official life that will have a stronger fascination for the student of history in the future than that connected with the framing and promulgation of his proclamation of emancipation. In fact, this is already regarded by many as the most conspicuous act of his grand career—the very climax and culmination of a life given for the salvation of the Republic. It is this fact which makes the story of the evolution of his emancipation policy of such absorbing interest.

There were two leading features of Lincoln's character which influenced the steps in his war policy leading up to the issue of his Emancipation Proclamation, viz: his love of freedom—which meant also his love of justice—and his respect for the Constitution and the laws. By nature and his deep sympathy with every species of human suffering a "radical" in respect to the former, he was, at the same time, inherently and strongly conservative as to the latter. It was this characteristic which enabled him to effect all that the most zealous champion of emancipation hoped for, while adhering most closely to legal and constitutional methods in its accomplishment. This was evident in his whole career from the scene in New Orleans, when, as a young flatboatman, he had his indignation aroused by a revolting exhibition of the horrors of slavery, down to the final and crowning act in the great drama in which he was the chief actor, the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation and the approval of the Constitutional Amendment abolishing slavery in all the States. While his spoken and written words during this period do not show that he always held to the same position in regard to methods, they indicate a conscientious and consistent adherence to the same principles. When circumstances required a change of policy, he had the courage to make it. This never im-

plied a backward step, but every change indicated progress in accordance with existing conditions. This was especially evident in his official policy after he was entrusted with the direction of national affairs; and it was his strong logical sense and strict adherence to legal and constitutional methods, as well as his sagacity in keeping "close to the people," that made the entire removal of slavery possible in harmony with the preservation of the Union, in spite of the impatient criticism of political friends and the armed hostility of open and avowed enemies.

Some of the more conspicuous acts in Lincoln's public career, which may be referred to as constituting eras in the development of his policy with regard to the institution of slavery, include the following: (1) His protest (in conjunction with one other member of the Illinois House of Representatives) against a series of pro-slavery resolutions which had passed both branches of the General Assembly at the session of 1837, in which he declared his belief "that the institution of slavery is founded in both injustice and bad policy," and that "the Congress of the United States has the power, under the Constitution, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia;" (2) his demonstration before the Supreme Court of Illinois, in 1841, of the right of a slave girl to freedom under the Ordinance of 1787—thus determining the application of that second charter of American freedom to Illinois territory; (3) his introduction in the Congressional House of Representatives, in January, 1847, of a bill for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, with the consent of the voters of the District and with compensation to the owners, together with his forty-two votes during the same session in favor of the Wilmot Proviso; (4) his speeches, beginning with the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854—and in opposition to that measure—extending to 1860, including the debates with Senator Douglas in 1858.

During this period of over twenty years, there are fre-

quent utterances of opinion on the subject of slavery in his private correspondence—as in his letter to his friend, Joshua F. Speed, in 1855—but always in harmony with the views he had expressed in public in uncompromising hostility to the “institution.” His speeches on the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and especially the debates of 1858, furnish a most complete and comprehensive discussion of the slavery issue in all its aspects, as that question then stood between the advocates and the opponents of extension into new Territories, and made him the natural leader of the newly organized party then consolidating its forces for the successful campaign of 1860. His conservative position during the early part of this period is shown by the fact that he did not participate in the first Anti-Nebraska State Convention, held at Springfield, October 4 and 5, 1854, and, as indicated by his letter to Ichabod Coddington of that year, declined to accept a place in the Republican State Central Committee to which he had been chosen by that convention. He clung to the hope, at that time, that the Whig party would be revived by ranging itself in opposition to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Yet no one questioned the consistency of his opinions and attitude on the slavery question, and, in 1856, he was in full sympathy with the Republican party, which came into full-fledged existence at Bloomington in that year. In taking this position he only followed out the injunction which he had given to his friends—the old line Whigs—at Peoria, in October, 1854, when he advised them to “stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.” In the same speech, referring to a professed indifference whether slavery should be “voted down or up,” which he construed to mean a “covert real zeal for the spread” of that institution, he said: “I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world; en-

ables the enemies of free institutions to taunt us as hypocrites; causes the friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and, especially, because it forces so many good men among ourselves into an open war on the very fundamental principles of civil liberty. . . . Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature—opposition to it, in his love of justice. . . . Repeal all compromises, repeal the Declaration of Independence, repeal all past history—you still cannot repeal human nature. It still will be the abundance of man's heart that slavery extension is wrong, and out of the abundance of his heart his mouth will continue to speak." As to the question, what should be done to rid the country of slavery, he said: "My first impulse would be to free all the slaves and send them to Liberia, to their own native land." Recognizing the physical impossibility of this, he concluded: "It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted; but, for their tardiness in this, I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the South"—thus indicating, at once, his preference as to modes of emancipation and his charity for the slaveholders themselves.

These extracts show how early in the agitation growing out of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, Lincoln had taken ground in opposition to slavery and in favor of its gradual abolition—a position which he consistently maintained up to the day of his election to the Presidency. These views were reiterated in his speech of July 10, 1858, from the balcony of the Tremont House in Chicago, in the declaration, "I have always hated slavery as much as any Abolitionist," and, in various forms, during the debates with Douglas of the same year. In the following year we find him in his speech at Cincinnati (on September 17, 1859), addressing himself to the citizens of his native State of Kentucky, courageously saying, "I think slavery is wrong, morally and politically. I desire that it should be no further spread in these United States, and I should not

object if it should gradually terminate in the whole Union." A few months later, in his speech in Cooper Institute, he put the question of the constitutional rights of slavery in the following logical form: "If slavery is right, all words, acts, laws and constitutions against it are themselves wrong and should be swept away. If it is right, we cannot justly object to its nationality—its universality; if it is wrong, they cannot justly insist upon its extension—its enlargement." And he closed his argument with the following characteristic plea: "Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." The same views were repeated at Hartford, New Haven, and elsewhere, and went far to convince the pronounced anti-slavery men of New England that the position of the author of these sentiments on the slavery question was not only thoroughly consistent, but they made him the logical candidate for the Presidency of those who wished to check the spread of that institution into the new States and Territories.

While the significance of these utterances, on the part of a man so soon to be charged with the duty of administering the affairs of the Government, will be recognized, it will be generally conceded that the most conspicuous event in Lincoln's career while he was yet a private citizen—conspicuous in relation to the time of its performance and in its effect, by drawing the attention of the whole country to him as a prominent figure in national politics—was his celebrated "house-divided-against-itself" speech, delivered after the Republican State Convention of Illinois in the city of Springfield on the evening of June 16, 1858. After nominating candidates for State Treasurer and State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the convention declared Lincoln its choice for United States Senator in opposition to Douglas, who, it was known, would be the choice of the Democracy. In the evening the convention reassem-

bled for its final session, the chief business being to listen to a promised speech from Lincoln. The place was the Hall of Representatives in the old State Capitol—a hall with historical associations for Illinoisans not unlike those belonging to the famous “Hall of William Rufus,” so brilliantly described by the gifted Macaulay in his essay on the “Trial of Warren Hastings.” The speech was delivered almost upon the identical spot on which, less than seven years later—after the results, which he then foreshadowed in language little short of prophecy, had been achieved through his agency—he lay, pale and motionless, in the presence of weeping thousands of his fellow-citizens, a mute but eloquent witness against the savage blood-thirstiness of “his taking off” and the brutal and fiendish tyranny of that system which he had given his life to destroy. The language of his wonderful exordium has been made familiar by frequent repetition, but is especially deserving of reproduction here. Speaking of the existing agitation on the subject of the further extension of slavery, he then said:

“In my opinion it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. ‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect that it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States—old as well as new—North as well as South.”

How apparent these truths now appear, but how few then saw them as Lincoln did! And how prophetic, in the light of the history of the next seven years, sound the concluding words of faith and encouragement:

“The result is not doubtful—if we stand firm we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate, or mistakes delay; but, sooner or later, the victory is sure to come.”

It was my privilege as a member of that Convention

on the evening of the delivery of this speech, to listen to that wonderful combination of inexorable logic and startling prophecy, and I have a vivid recollection of the impressive deliberation and earnestness with which he uttered truths of the full significance of which he even then seemed to have a just appreciation. It preceded Seward's famous speech in which he announced the doctrine of an "irrepressible conflict," and foreshadowed more clearly than that the final result. It was an alarm bell rung in the night, announcing the beginning of that struggle between the friends of freedom and slavery, which, less than three years afterwards, culminated in the shock of war that shook this land as it had never been shaken before.

That Lincoln regarded this speech as marking an era in his political life, if not in the life of the nation, is shown by his refusal to comply with the advice of friends to modify some of its most startling declarations, and by his later statement to a deputation of the Society of Friends, who called upon him in June, 1862, to urge the adoption of an emancipation policy, when, in answer to their reference to the extract quoted above as an implied pledge to that effect, he said: "The sentiments contained in that passage were deliberately uttered, and I hold them now."

The testimony of his intimate friends proves that the whole speech had not only been carefully written out in advance, but it was delivered with an impressive solemnity, a measured diction and an emphasis unusual even for Lincoln. When it appeared in print, as it did without delay, it startled those who heard it. It drew a line between the friends of freedom and slavery almost as sharp and distinct as the war did three years later, and many who had been his life-long friends found themselves ranged on the side of his political enemies. That Lincoln felt this condition most deeply cannot be doubted, in view of the genial character of his friendships, and was well known to his more intimate associates, although it did not cause him to

abate one jot of his position. Some of his staunchest political friends were dumb, not because they dissented from his inevitable conclusions, but because they doubted whether the time had come for their announcement. His more aggressive enemies felt that a favorable opportunity was now afforded to assail a dangerous political leader, and they did not hesitate to denounce the speech and its author as teaching the most arrant abolitionism and disunionism. Both were mistaken, as a careful reading of that prophetic production in the light of subsequent history demonstrates. Lincoln had only read the signs of the times and forecast the future more accurately than his fellows, as he often did during the war period which followed.

These views may be taken as indicating very accurately Mr. Lincoln's position on this question at the time of his nomination for the Presidency on a platform, the leading features of which were a declaration in favor of the perpetuation of the Union and opposition to the further extension of slavery. Regarding this as sufficiently explicit, he declined repeated and urgent invitations to furnish for publication, during the pending campaign, any further statement of his policy. To a friend who urged him to make such a statement, a few weeks previous to the election, he wrote:

"I appreciate your motive when you suggest the propriety of my writing for the public something disclaiming all intention to interfere with slaves or slavery in the States; but, in my judgment, it would do no good. I have already done this many, many times; and it is in print and open to all who will read. Those who will not read or heed what I have already publicly said, would not read or heed a repetition of it. 'If they hear not Moses and his prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.'"

After the election, and pending his assumption of the duties of his office, he replied to the editor of a paper in a slave State, who had written urging him to "make some public declaration" of his views:

"I could say nothing which I have not already said, and which is in print and accessible to the public. Please pardon

me for suggesting that, if papers like yours, which heretofore have persistently garbled and misrepresented what I have said, will now fully and fairly place it before their readers, there can be no further misunderstanding."

Nevertheless, he was a careful observer of political events, as shown by his letters to Congressmen Kellogg and Washburne of Illinois. To the former, after the convening of Congress in December, 1860, he wrote:

"Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. . . . The tug has to come, and better now than later".

To Washburne he said:

"Prevent, as far as possible, any of our friends from demoralizing themselves and our cause by entertaining propositions for compromise of any sort on 'slavery extension.' There is no possible compromise upon it but which puts us under again, and leaves all our work to do over again. . . . On that point hold firm as with a chain of steel."

There is nothing in his correspondence, during this period, more pregnant with meaning than his letter to the Hon. John A. Gilmer of North Carolina, well known as a conservative Southern man and Unionist, who had been mentioned as a possible member of Lincoln's first cabinet. To Gilmer, who had evidently written him in the spirit of some of the correspondents already referred to, Lincoln replied at considerable length. The following extracts are the most significant:

"I am greatly disinclined to write a letter on the subject embraced in yours; and I would not do so even privately as I do, were it not that I fear that you might misconstrue my silence. Is it desired I shall shift the ground upon which I have been elected? I cannot do it. You need only to acquaint yourself with that ground and press it on the attention of the South. It is all in print and easy of access. May I be pardoned if I ask whether even you have ever attempted to procure the reading of the Republican platform, or my speeches, by the Southern people? If not, what reason have I to expect that any additional production of mine would meet a better fate? It would make me appear as if I repented the crime of having been elected, and was anxious to apologize and beg forgiveness. . . . On the Territorial question I am inflexible. . . . On that there is a difference between you and us; and it is the only substantial difference. You think slavery is right and ought to be extended; we think it is wrong and ought to be restricted."

There could be no clearer statement of the relative positions of Lincoln and his opponents, on the day of his inauguration, than this quotation. In his inaugural he defined the issue between the respective sections of the Union in almost identically the same terms; and, as a further negative definition of his policy, he said: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so"—which was a literal quotation from his first debate with Douglas at Ottawa in 1858. His attitude then was precisely what it had been from the organization of the Republican party; and that was entirely consistent with the views he had repeatedly expressed from the day he protested against the pro-slavery resolution adopted by the Illinois Legislature in 1837.

The beginning of the war, following closely upon the inauguration, forced upon Lincoln, as it forced upon the country, the recognition of a condition of affairs totally unprecedented in the nation's history. As he had previously endured every species of misrepresentation, calumny and detraction from his enemies without complaint, so now he was subjected to criticism and censure from those who had been his friends, but were impatient to have their favorite policy of emancipation adopted. Yet it was as true then that he had "an oath registered in heaven . . . to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution," as it was on the day he was inaugurated; and, as he rightly construed the Constitution, that protected the rights of the States until they were forfeited by acts of their citizens or compelled to give way before the higher obligation to preserve the Government and maintain the Union. Of the time when this step should become necessary—if at all—he was the judge; and, while it was no doubt painful for him to differ with the friends of freedom by overruling the emancipation proclamation of Fremont and the order of Gen. Hunter, he assumed the responsibility with the same courage

with which he had, at the outbreak of the war, dared to resist the scheme of secession. That he desired that "all men should be free" had been proved by his oft-repeated assertion to that effect; but he also believed "gradual, and not sudden, emancipation better for all"—for master as well as for slave—for Government as well as for people—and he advocated the policy of allowing compensation for the value of liberated slaves as a matter of economy no less than of right to loyal slave owners. When, early in the second year of the war, the acts abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia and prohibiting it in all the Territories had been passed in succession and met his prompt approval, he made his last earnest appeal to the Congressmen from the border slave States in behalf of his favorite policy of compensated emancipation, but without effect. Had the South been wise enough to accept that policy, it would have saved hundreds of millions of treasure and hundreds of thousands of lives; besides this, the reconciliation of the warring sections and their recovery from the ravages of hostilities would have been most speedy. The Southern people were too much blinded by prejudice and passion to give the subject a moment's consideration, and thus they invited their own undoing.

It was at this time that Lincoln began to turn his attention seriously to the policy of emancipation in those portions of the rebel States which persisted in their resistance to Federal authority. On the 13th of July, 1862, he opened up the subject to Secretary Welles and Secretary Seward, and on the 22nd—three days after his last futile conference with the Congressmen from the border States—he brought the matter before the whole cabinet. Accepting the advice of Secretary Seward, who argued that the step at that time would be premature, he consented to postpone action until some success had been won in the field. The battle of Antietam furnished the occasion for which he had been waiting. Lincoln completed the second draft of his preliminary

proclamation, of which he had prepared the first in July, submitted it to the cabinet on Saturday, September 20—three days after the battle—revised it on Sunday morning, added two verbal changes suggested by Secretary Seward; it received the official signature on Monday following, and was given to the world. The step was taken without consultation with the cabinet, but avowedly and explicitly on the responsibility of the President himself, and, as he declared in the final proclamation in January following, “as an act of justice warranted by the Constitution upon military necessity.” The diaries of members of the cabinet show that, at most, only two of the members of that body distinctly approved the measure as to time and manner, and one (Postmaster-General Blair), who objected on the grounds of political expediency, asked and obtained permission to file a protest with the document. One of Lincoln’s most sturdy and sagacious friends, Secretary Gideon Welles, who was acquainted with every step taken by the administration, and whose Spartan firmness saved the Government from many a blunder, says of the proclamation:

“It was his (Lincoln’s) own act, a bold step, an executive measure originating with him, and was, as stated in the memorable appeal at the close of the final proclamation, invoking for it the considerate judgment of mankind, warranted alone by military necessity. . . . Results have proved that there was in the measure profound thought, statesmanship, courage and far-seeing sagacity—consummate executive and administrative ability, which was, after some reverses, crowned with success. The nation emerging from gloom and disaster, and the whole civilized world, united in awarding honor and gratitude to the illustrious man who had the mind to conceive and the courage and firmness to decree the emancipation of a race.”

And yet there are those who profess to believe that, in taking this step, Lincoln acted with unjustifiable hesitation and reluctance. That the duty imposed upon him was unexpected and undesired is no doubt true, as the war which made it a necessity was undesired. How little of agreement there was among pronounced Union men in Congress, during the first year of the war, in reference to the manner of dealing with slaves and the question of slavery in the

rebellious States, is shown by the fact that a bill freeing the slaves of rebel masters failed in the House of Representatives in the last days of May, 1862, though a measure going even farther than this became a law, with the President's approval, on the 17th of July following. Thus it appears that Congress, no less than the administration, was "at sea" on this question, though progressing towards the final haven. What wonder, then, that the President, who was compelled to bear upon his shoulders the entire responsibility of his policy, should hesitate to take the most momentous step of his administration, when it was doubtful, not merely whether that step would be approved by the people—which was essential to the success of the Union cause—but whether it would be sustained by a Union Congress? The responsibility resting upon him, as Commander-in-Chief of the army and navy in such an emergency, was infinitely greater, and the task confronting him more difficult and delicate than that which any legislator was called upon to face. Even the Cabinet was not free from dissension, as proven by the secret history of that body coming to light in later years.

It is true that, in a conference held with advocates of immediate emancipation during the summer of 1862—notably with the Chicago clergymen on the 13th of September—Lincoln suggested arguments which implied opposition to the measure, as he also did in his famous letter to Horace Greeley, of August 22nd of that year, when he declared:

"My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery and the colored race I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union."

In conclusion he impressively added:

"I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men everywhere could be free."

This undoubtedly expressed his whole creed, so far as

emancipation and preservation of the Union were concerned; and, in expressing it, he was preparing the way for the one, while seeking to secure the other. Yet how few comprehend the full significance of these sententious propositions! To the Chicago committee, referring to the objections he had suggested to their policy, he said: "They indicate the difficulties that have thus far prevented my action in some such way as you desire. I have not decided against a proclamation of liberty to the slaves, but hold the matter under advisement; and I assure you that the subject is on my mind, by day and night, more than any other. Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I will do." Not less significant was his remark to some western gentlemen, as testified by Moncure D. Conway, in the *Fortnightly Review* of 1865: "We shall want all the anti-slavery feeling in the country and more; go home and screw the people up to it, and you may say anything you like about me, if that will help." This indicates that he was willing to be criticised, if that would aid in bringing about the grand result. And, at the very moment when uttering these sentiments, as also when writing his reply to Mr. Greeley, *the first draft of the preliminary emancipation proclamation was lying in his desk*, and within ten days after his interview with the Chicago committee—the time for the fulfillment of his vow having arrived in the success of the Union arms at Antietam—the proclamation became an accomplished fact. The spirit of the act was shown in his response to a serenade on the second day after the document was made public: "What I did, I did after a very full deliberation and under a very heavy and solemn responsibility. I can only trust in God I have made no mistake. . . . It is now for the country and the world to pass judgment, and, may be, take action upon it." When, less than three months before his assassination, Congress adopted the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting slavery throughout the United States, he found his act ratified and extended by the

highest legislative power in the land—"winding the whole thing up," as he expressed it—as it had already been approved by the people and sustained by the army in the field.

That Lincoln's policy as to emancipation underwent modifications and changes is unquestionable; but they were founded in wisdom, while the principles actuating him were steadfast and unalterable. The one was progressive, varying with the changing conditions and demands of the time; the other fixed on the inexorable logic of facts and events. He had the courage to follow wherever his invincible logic led, yet he did not always act until his unerring sagacity enabled him to perceive that some useful result was to be attained thereby—a fact illustrated in his delay of the emancipation proclamation until he believed the people were ready to accept and sustain it. While seeming to follow public sentiment, he skillfully contrived to guide and direct it. This was the secret of his hold upon the popular heart: keeping "close to the people," he made himself a part of them, and no public man in American history has been held, at once, in such exalted veneration and in such intimate and sympathetic fellowship.

Having once taken his position there was no backward step in his policy. This was shown in his course with reference alike to the emancipation question and the rights of negroes employed in the army. From his order prescribing retaliation for every colored soldier executed by the rebels in violation of the laws of war, or sold into slavery, to the instructions to Secretary Seward controlling his action at the Hampton Roads conference, in January, 1865—that there will be "no receding by the Executive of the United States on the slavery question from the position assumed thereon in the late annual message to Congress and in preceding documents"—the policy of Lincoln on this subject was uniform, as the following utterances will show:

"If they (the colored soldiers) stake their lives for us, they

must be prompted by the strongest motive—even the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept.”—*Letter read before the Union Mass Meeting at Springfield, Illinois, September 3, 1863.*

“While I remain in my present position I shall not attempt to retract or modify the Emancipation Proclamation; nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress.”—*Annual Message, December 8, 1863.*

“Having determined to use the negro as a soldier, there is no way but to give him all the protection given to any soldier.”—*Address at Baltimore Sanitary Fair, April 18, 1864.*

“In presenting the abandonment of armed resistance to the National authority on the part of the insurgents as the only indispensable condition of peace, I retract nothing heretofore said as to slavery. I repeat the declaration made a year ago, that, while I shall not attempt to retract or modify the Emancipation Proclamation; nor shall I return to slavery any person who is free by the terms of that proclamation, or by any of the acts of Congress. . . . If the people should, by whatever mode or means, make it an executive duty to re-enslave such persons, another and not I, must be their instrument to perform it.”—*Annual Message, December 6, 1864.*

The celebrated letter, “To Whom It May Concern,” under which Horace Greeley was authorized to confer with the so-called “Commissioners” of the Confederate Government at Niagara Falls, in July, 1864, was couched in similar terms, pledging the Government to the consideration of “any proposition which embraces the restoration of peace, the integrity of the whole Union and the abandonment of slavery.” And, in an interview held in August, 1864, he said in regard to a proposition that had been made to him:

“There are men base enough to propose to me to return to slavery our black warriors of Port Hudson and Olustee, and thus win the respect of the masters they fought. Should I do so, I should deserve to be damned in time and in eternity. Come what may, I will keep faith with the black man. . . . No human power can subdue this rebellion without the emancipation policy. I will abide the issue.”

These quotations show with what unswerving fidelity and invincible firmness Abraham Lincoln, having once taken his stand on the platform of emancipation, ever after stood by his pledge. Such examples illustrate and confirm what has been said in relation to the development of his anti-

slavery policy. With characteristic modesty, he said to Mr. Hodges of Kentucky:

"I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now at the end of three years' struggle, the nation's condition is not what either party or any man devised or expected. God alone can claim it. Whither it is tending seems plain. If God now wills the removal of a great wrong, and wills that we of the North, as well as you of the South, shall pay fairly for our complicity in that wrong, impartial history will find therein new cause to attest and revere the justice and goodness of God."

Yet what leader, with such instrumentalities and in the face of such perplexities, ever before brought forth such beneficent results? From the pathetic and marvelously touching appeal for peace and Union in his first inaugural—an appeal that has never been surpassed, if equaled, in impressiveness and power in any state paper, and which could only fail of its object because the minds of those to whom it was addressed had been blinded by prejudice and hate—down to the reverent acknowledgment to Almighty God, in his second and last, for the success of the Union arms and the recognition of His power in so controlling the struggle as to end in the destruction of slavery, all his official and private utterances breathe the same spirit of faith in the final triumph, with a more emphatic determination to protect the freed slaves in their newly acquired rights. In all there is no evidence that he ever swerved from the confidence expressed in his Springfield speech:

"We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate or mistakes delay, but sooner or later, the victory is sure to come."

That faith—first uttered in anticipation of a protracted political struggle, firmly maintained in succeeding stages of the conflict of arms, and confirmed in the final triumph of emancipation as an incident of the war, and not its primary object—grew with every step in the progress of the contest. And when, in the closing words of his last inaugural, he declared: "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet,

if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn by the lash shall be paid by another drawn by the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still must it be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.' " From that hour the world no longer had reason for doubting that Abraham Lincoln was inspired by a sublime patriotic and religious purpose, and that he had never lost sight of the result which he predicted in his great speech in the old State House at Springfield, delivered on that June evening in 1858. During all of this most tragic period of the Nation's history, although compelled to deal with problems and face emergencies such as never confronted any other occupant of the Presidential chair, he invariably rose to the demands of the occasion, whether involving questions of national or of foreign policy. While Garrison, Phillips and other anti-slavery leaders of half a century ago, aided unintentionally by their pro-slavery antagonists, were the pioneers in the agitation which aroused the people to a true conception of the enormities of American slavery, it was Lincoln that furnished and put in operation the conserving influence which finally welded radicalism and conservatism together, and made the destruction of slavery compatible with law and the preservation of the Union. In the language of Grant at the dedication of the Lincoln monument at Springfield in 1874, "In his death the Nation lost its greatest hero; in his death, the South lost its most just friend."

One who was a personal friend and admirer of Lincoln, as well as his political supporter, but who was confessedly dissatisfied with his early emancipation policy, when he saw the array of evidence presented in this study, going to prove Lincoln's consistency and fidelity to principle, wrote: "How much wiser he was than all his people!" His highest eulogy is to state what he was and what he did. In his

public career personal and national history are so intimately blended and interwoven, that it is impossible wholly to separate them. And it is in view of what he said and what he did, and of the death that he died, that the prophecy contained in the sadly musical words which form the closing paragraph of his first inaugural address is receiving a new significance and its most impressive fulfillment; that "the mystic chords of memory, stretching away from every battlefield and patriot grave to every heart and hearthstone all over this broad land," have begun to "swell the chorus of the Union," when touched, as they surely have been, "by the better angels of our nature." But the most potent touch was applied by the hand of Abraham Lincoln, and the responsive strings will go on vibrating, with ever increasing melody, through the coming ages of our national existence.

DEATH OF LINCOLN.

A Reminiscence of the Tragedy of April 14, 1865.

The following article from the pen of the author of the preceding address contains the first editorial comment upon the assassination of President Lincoln, which appeared in the columns of his home paper, *The Illinois State Journal*, of Springfield, Ill. During the Civil War period the writer was associated with the editorial department of *The Journal*, the only morning paper then published in Springfield receiving the regular telegraphic reports of the Associated Press, and outside of the mechanical department of the paper, was the first citizen of Springfield to receive intelligence of the crime, the announcement of which, a few hours later, shocked the whole nation. After spending much of the night at the side of the operator in the telegraph office, awaiting the latest report of Mr. Lincoln's condition, the writer retired from the office about 6 a. m., but on returning three hours later, met intelligence of the fatal outcome of the assassin's revolting crime, which was announced in a brief "Extra," and by noon many of the business houses and residences of Springfield were draped in mourning, and a feeling of horror pervaded the entire population. The first regular issue of *The Illinois State Journal* after the calamitous event occurred on Monday, April 17, 1865, from which this article is taken.

THE GREAT NATIONAL CALAMITY.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN IS DEAD! These portentous words, as they sped over the wires throughout the length and breadth of the land on Saturday morning last, sent a thrill of agony through millions of loyal hearts and shrouded a nation, so lately rejoicing in the hour of victory, in the

deepest sorrow. The blow came at a moment so unexpected and was so sudden and staggering, the crime by which he fell was so atrocious and the manner of it so revolting, that men were unable to realize the fact that one of the purest of patriots, the most beloved and honored of Presidents, and the most forbearing and magnanimous of rulers had perished at the hands of an assassin. The horrifying details recalled only scenes which had disgraced the barbaric ages. People were unwilling to believe that, in our own time, there could be found men capable of a crime so utterly fiendish and brutal. One of the assassins, in a crowded theater, stealthily approaches a man against whom he could have no just cause of enmity; a man so tender in his feelings and so sympathetic, that all his errors were on the side of mercy; a man who had been twice elected to the highest office in the gift of a great people—and without notice of his presence while his victim, with his wife sitting by his side, is wholly unconscious of danger, deliberately discharges a pistol from behind, piercing the head of the President with the fatal ball, then availing himself of the bewilderment of the audience, leaps from the stage and makes his escape. The other assassin, at nearly the same moment, obtrudes himself into the sick chamber of a man who, but a few days before, had narrowly escaped death by being thrown from his carriage, and whose life is hardly yet free from danger, and commences a murderous assault upon his prostrate and helpless victim and his unarmed attendants. It is impossible to conceive of anything more fiendish and diabolical. And yet this is "Chivalry!"—and its perpetrators profess to be influenced by the love of Liberty! It is the chivalry of the desperado and the love of liberty which controls the highwayman and the enemy of humanity.

The nation is bereaved. Every loyal man and woman mourns the loss of one whose unswerving justice, whose pure and unsullied character and whose mercifulness towards his enemies had won the respect of those enemies themselves. All but traitors mourn him as a personal friend. At such an hour as this, and in sight of the fearful crime that has been committed, the spirit of mere partisanship is disarmed and its voice is silenced. Nothing but the most demoniac treason dares to assail a man so foully dealt with or gloat over "The deep damnation of his taking off."

President Lincoln died at the hand of *Slavery*. It was Slavery that conceived the fearful deed; it was Slavery that sought and found the willing instrument and sped the fatal ball; it is Slavery alone that will justify the act. Henceforth men will look upon Slavery as indeed "the sum of all villainies," the fruitful parent of all crime. This murder was an assault upon the principle of free government, inasmuch as its victim was the choice of a majority of the nation for the office which he filled. He has fallen in the very hour of victory, when constitutional free government was being vindicated and when peace seemed just ready to return to a land torn and distracted by civil war. Despite the calumnies of his enemies, his fame is now secure. History and posterity will now do him justice. His memory will be a rich inheritance to our nation, attracting to his tomb the lovers of freedom from all lands and dividing, with that of Washington, the admiration of the world. With a slight change of phraseology, the closing lines of the magnificent lyric (the "Battle Hymn of the Republic") will apply to the death of Abraham Lincoln:

"As *Christ* died to make men holy,
So *HE* *died* to make men free,
While God is marching on."

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

Paul Selby, the author of the foregoing address, was born in Pickaway County, Ohio, July 20, 1825; at the age of nineteen removing to southern Illinois, where he was engaged in teaching four years, chiefly in Madison County. In 1848 he entered Illinois College, at Jacksonville, leaving that institution in his junior year (1852) to assume the editorship of *The Morgan Journal*, at Jacksonville, with which he remained until 1858, covering the period of the

organization of the Republican Party, in which *The Journal* took an active part. It was at the suggestion of this paper that a convention of Anti-Nebraska editors of the State of Illinois was held at Decatur, on the 22nd of February, 1856, for the purpose of defining a line of policy for a new party. The call for this convention was endorsed by twenty-five editors of the State, but on the day of its assembling, owing to a snowstorm which blocked many of the railroads, only twelve were in attendance, among those present being Dr. Charles H. Ray, of *The Chicago Tribune*, the late George Schneider, then of *The Chicago Staats Zeitung*, B. F. Shaw, now of *The Dixon Telegraph*, and nine others. Mr. Selby was made chairman of the meeting and W. J. Usrey of *The Decatur Chronicle*, Secretary. Abraham Lincoln was present, and in conference with the Committee on Resolutions, of which Charles H. Ray was Chairman, took part in framing a platform in opposition to the further extension of slavery, and recommending the holding of a State Convention at Bloomington on the 29th of May following, which resulted in the formal organization of the new party, and at which Mr. Lincoln delivered what has been called his "Lost Speech." It was at this Decatur meeting that Mr. Selby was brought in close contact with Mr. Lincoln, and in after years was a frequent visitor at his office in Springfield. On June 16, 1858, Mr. Selby was a member of the State Convention at Springfield, which named Mr. Lincoln as its candidate for United States Senator, and before which, on the evening of that day, he delivered his celebrated "house divided against itself" speech, which forecast so accurately events which occurred during the next seven years, and in which he bore so conspicuous a part. This speech Mr. Selby recalls as having been delivered almost identically from the same spot in the Hall of Representatives on which the catafalque bearing the Martyred President's lifeless remains rested in May, 1865.

After two years (1859-1861), spent in educational work in Louisiana, Mr. Selby returned North in July, 1861, and in July, 1862, became associate editor of *The Illinois State Journal* in Mr. Lincoln's home city of Springfield, where he remained until after the close of the war. Later he was associated in an editorial capacity with *The Chicago Evening Journal*, *The Chicago Republican*, and for six years as editor of *The Quincy Whig*, when in 1874, he resumed his old position on *The State Journal*, four years later becoming one of its proprietors and editor-in-chief, a position which he held almost continuously for fifteen years. In 1880 he was appointed Postmaster of the city of Springfield, was re-appointed in 1884, serving for a period of six years and resigning during the administration of Grover Cleveland in 1886. Disposing of his interest in *The State Journal* in 1889, in the following year he removed to Chi-

icago, where he has since been engaged in literary work, during 1897 and 1898, being connected with the editorial department of *The Chicago Tribune*. In all he has spent about forty years in newspaper work, of which about twenty years was in connection with *The Illinois State Journal*, which, during Mr. Lincoln's life, was regarded as his home organ.



